



The Book

Number 2, March 1984

Newsletter of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture
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Note from the Editors

Although the first issue of this newsletter, published in November 1983, announced a semiannual publication schedule, it soon became apparent that a more frequent schedule was necessary if the newsletter's communications goals were to be met. Thus, with issue number 2 of *The Book*, we announce a policy of thrice-yearly publication. Issue number 3 will be out in July.

With this issue we inaugurate two new features—brief notes (not reviews) on books both new and old that should be of interest to laborers in our field and research notes on significant work in progress prepared by the scholars who are doing the work. As with all other kinds of news, the editors welcome contributions of book notes and research notes by readers of this newsletter.

James Wells to Deliver 1984 Wiggins Lecture

James M. Wells, custodian emeritus of the John M. Wing Foundation on the History of Printing and former vice-president of the Newberry Library, has been named the second James Russell Wiggins Lecturer in the History of the Book in American Culture. Wells will speak at the American Antiquarian Society on Wednesday, October 31, 1984. The tentative title of Wells's lecture is "American Printing: The Search for Self-Sufficiency." Details of the occasion will be published in the July issue of *The Book*.

AAS Plans Conference on Needs and Opportunities

For its Program in the History of the Book in American Culture, the American Antiquarian Society has received a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to support a conference on "Needs and Opportunities for Research in the History of the Book in American Culture." This conference will take place at AAS November 1-3, 1984.

The purpose of this invitational conference is to survey the entire field of book history in America through 1876. Out of this survey will emerge a

description of research opportunities and interpretative themes in this growing field of study. In addition to commissioning work by many leading American scholars at work in the field, the conference will draw upon the expertise of European historians of the book, several of whom, including Roger Chartier, co-editor of *L'histoire de l'édition Française*, Michael L. Turner, head of conservation at the Bodleian Library, and Bernhard Fabian, professor of English at the Westfälisches Wilhelms-Universität in West Germany, will participate as commentators. The Society will publish the papers prepared for the conference. It is expected that the conference will help establish a research agenda for the Program that will eventually bear fruit in the publication, in the early 1990s, of a major multivolume, collaborative history of the book in American culture.

The July issue of this newsletter will provide more details on the conference.

Books and Computers

As the Age of the Computer sweeps into its grasp the tasks of library cataloguing and descriptive bibliography, there is an understandable concern for the ways that such machine-readable data can be adapted to benefit the historian. This concern is especially significant here at the American Antiquarian Society. The long-term research interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture can only be satisfied when and if the data on tens of thousands of imprints can be manipulated by computer in response to numerous variables. Indeed, even such simple matters of relationships, such as the changing size and quantity of imprints, can be established much more easily via computer than through the honorable but painstaking process of handcounting. And once such data is available, historians will undoubtedly begin to ask more complex questions of it.

The process of adapting the computer to historical studies is already underway at AAS. The North American Imprints Program (NAIP) is designed to create a highly detailed, machine-readable data base of catalogue records of all books, pamphlets, and broadsides printed before 1801 in what are now the

United States and Canada. This research program is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. These records will eventually be available in the RLIN and other bibliographical data bases and as part of the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue, and will one day be available for various sophisticated data processing tasks at the Antiquarian Society.

There is another kind of data that also invites the use of the computer: the lists of book owners (both individuals and institutions) that exist by the many thousands in probate inventories, published catalogues, and the like. We are eager to hear from persons who have worked with such records, and especially from those who would be interested in helping to develop computer programs and protocols for recording this data. Our goal is to make the American Antiquarian Society a repository for such records in order to facilitate the systematic study of the history of reading patterns.

Book Notes

NEUBURG ON POPULAR LITERATURE

Victor E. Neuburg, who teaches at the North London Polytechnic (U.K.), has written widely on chapbooks, education, and literacy in eighteenth-century England. In his essay, "The Diceys and the Chapbook Trade" (*The Library*, 5th ser., 24 [1969: 219-31]), he traces the history of an eighteenth-century firm that specialized in this ephemera. But the most useful of his publications, and a book that deserves a far wider audience, is *Popular Literature: A History and Guide from the Beginning of Printing to the Year 1897*. Originally published by Penguin Books in 1977, the book has been reprinted by Woburn Press in England, but at present no American edition is available.

Popular Literature is a competent guide to the British materials that impinge upon our history. The narrative that precedes an annotated bibliography is a lively review of trends, events, key texts, and structures. The final section, pp. 265-97, consists of annotated lists of sources and studies of ballads, chapbooks, and "penny" or street publications. The bibliography also

includes materials on literacy, the book trade, tracts, popular fiction, methodology, and other topics. The listings and the commentary are invaluable to the historian of American books, to whom mastering the European and British background of literature in America is so important.

D.D.H.

Research Notes

A FICTIVE PEOPLE

My book-length research project, "A Fictive People," concerns the reading public for American novels, 1837-57. The first fifth of the study, which was supported by the American Antiquarian Society's Albert Boni Fellowship and which has been offered as a doctoral dissertation at New York University, deals with the influence of antebellum economic development on the reading public. The topics of discussion in this introductory portion of the project are the evolution of the publishing industry brought about by labor and technological innovations, the change in book distribution patterns inspired by the transportation revolution, and the limitations upon the audience imposed by the nature of American economic conditions.

The remainder of the project looks at the antebellum reading public for American novels from several different perspectives. The fiction lists of the leading twenty publishers of American novels during the period have been analyzed on the basis of content to arrive at some sense of the nature and scope of the reading public's taste. In addition, a model of author-audience communications, assembled primarily from authorial biographies, has been constructed in order to suggest how audience response shaped what authors wrote. The myriad ways through which publishers attempted to determine their market, both from the trade itself and from direct confrontation with that market, comprises yet another area of inquiry.

Additional information about publishers' notions of their markets has been derived from a study of book advertising (i.e., how and where publishers advertised their books). The relationship between the bookstore and the reader of American novels has been considered in light of the place of fiction within the larger business of the retailer and on the basis of the bookstore's role as a characteristic institution of antebellum urban life. (In these last three areas of inquiry, the AAS's holdings proved especially valuable.) Research still underway includes: the identification of American readers of novels and their reading patterns through analyses of selected library circulation records (that of the New York Society Library's has already been sampled); the relationship of literary culture, particularly that of criticism appearing in periodicals, to the reading of

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The Editors welcome all news relevant to the interests of the Program in the History of the Book in American Culture.

fiction; the evidences of novel-reading to be found in book and periodical subscription lists; and the cultural context of novel reading (and of larger reading patterns) as suggested in selected contemporary diaries and other autobiographical materials.

The final portion of "A Fictive People" will venture some interpretations of the fictional literature of this period from the perspective of the reading public, both as it actually existed and as it was imagined in the minds of antebellum publishers, authors, and bookstore owners.

The possible significance of "A Fictive People" for the larger field of the history of the book grows out of its attempt to construct a complex, multidimensional model for understanding shifts in reading taste. By portraying the reader as an active co-participant, along with writers, publishers, retailers, and critics, in the production of literature, the model avoids oversimplified equations between printing innovations and the changing state of knowledge. The model also serves as a corrective to the equally facile assumption that the mediating influence of the booktrade is not an essential consideration in determining how books, particularly bestsellers, reflect a collective, national "mind."

Ronald J. Zboray
Pace University

DIFFUSION OF INFORMATION

"The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865" is a book-length study of information diffusion, a central element in the American communications revolution, ca. 1760-1860. The study considers the social consequences of the vast and rapid expansion of print and public oratory. Specifically, this work analyzes the individual experiences of fifty people who lived during some part of that revolution, tracing their encounters with conversation, reading, writing, oratory, and public ceremony. Relying chiefly on diary sources, and comparing the experiences of people at different times and in varied social locations, this study explores how an abundance of print and oratory as well as the swift diffusion of news came to affect power relationships in the family, the community, and in politics. Because of the greater incidence of surviving diaries, and because the communications revolution came first to the Northeast and penetrated it most thoroughly, the study emphasizes that geographical area, although it also treats the Chesapeake and Old Northwest regions for purposes of comparison.

The primary significance of the project derives from its unusual angle of vision on the much-studied communications revolution. Principally, it seeks to elucidate the impact of technological changes and the ways in which access to and concern for information affected individuals, families, churches, and political activity. By analyzing what people read, and in what

context, the study attempts to understand the qualitative dimensions of literacy. The study aims at testing the hypothesis that changing communication patterns altered relations between leaders and their constituencies so as to undermine the unified, hierarchic qualities of colonial society, and accelerate the arrival of the competitive, polycentric social, cultural, and political order of nineteenth-century America.

Work on the study began as part of an NEH fellowship at the Society during 1977-78.

Richard D. Brown
University of Connecticut

READING BECOMES A NECESSITY

The general project that I have been working on since the late 1960s deals with the interplay of material and cultural change in the modernization of the American Northeast between 1780 and 1845. The study is divided into three parts: the structure of material and cultural change in the Upper Connecticut River Valley; the response to change, or the reaction against it, in five rural New England areas; and the private life and public career of the Northeast's major prophet of early industrial civilization, Orestes A. Brownson, who was born and raised in the Upper Valley.

Presently, I am completing final revisions of the first book in this study, entitled "Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Culture and Material Change in Rural New England, 1780-1830." This work focuses upon the first two rural generations in the Western world where the vast majority of females as well as males not only acquired the ability to read and write but also maintained it by lifelong reading. When printing and reading became established societal activities in the Northeast during the first half century after the Revolution, leading advocates of lifelong reading such as Noah Webster assumed that reading would be an agent of continuity, reinforcing the traditional wisdom of the ages. This attitude shaped the content of primers and district schoolbooks used to inculcate literacy. However, once elementary skills were mastered, a relish for reading was, owing to the nature of the printed medium, not easily restricted. The result was a gradual increase in works representing originality in intellectual life, and emphasizing change over continuity and this world over the next.

Perhaps the most important problem analyzed in "Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life" is the question of how participation in the world of print varied within portions of the population. How did the material and cultural conditions of life of various communities of readers, each with a partially shared but nonetheless distinctive understanding of the world, make these communities different from each other? I conclude that knowledge of the world, made possible by mass literacy, created the first "modern" culture, one in

which vastly different views of the world and beliefs about it could coexist within a small geographical area. The result was a society much more pluralistic in its material interests and cultural relations than any previous generation—the first truly modern mass culture.

William J. Gilmore
Stockton State College

Call for Papers

The Library History Seminar VII, entitled “Books, Libraries and Culture,” will be held in March 1985 at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The conference will explore the role and significance of graphic records in society. Without limitation of chronological period, geographical region, type of library, or type of media, topics may include, but are not limited to, the following: biographical studies; institutional development; collecting efforts; cultural and socioeconomic environments; literacy, reading, and libraries; history of the profession; philosophy of librarianship; bibliographical history; comparative librarianship; research methods; sources for research; and teaching methods.

Prospectuses of no more than 500 words should be sent before July 1, 1984, to Donald G. Davis, Jr., Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Texas at Austin, Box 7576, University Station, Austin, Texas 78712.

Papers selected for presentation at the seminar will be published by the University of Texas Press. The conference is sponsored by the *Journal of Library History*, the Graduate School of Library and Information Science of the University of Texas at Austin, and by the School of Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Rare Book School

There may still be time to register for one or more of the several week-long courses being offered in July and August by the Rare Book School of Columbia University's School of Library Service. Applications received by April 15, 1984, will be given preferential treatment, although later applications will also be considered. For information and application forms, contact: Rare Book School, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York, New York 10027; telephone (212) 280-2292.

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